



# Selkirk Mountains woodland caribou

## *Rangifer tarandus caribou*

### STATUS

Endangered (49 FR7394, February 29, 1984)

### DESCRIPTION

Woodland caribou are medium-sized members of the deer family. They are distinguished from other members of the family by their large hooves, broad muzzles and distinctive antlers. Caribou are the only deer species in which both sexes develop antlers. Their antlers have a long, sweeping main beam up to five feet wide, with one or two brow tines called *shovels* that extend over the face. Males shed their antlers from November to April, and females drop theirs in May and June. Most caribou are medium-brown or gray, with somewhat lighter-colored winter coats. The average life-span of an adult caribou is eight to twelve years, with most reaching maturity at three years. Male caribou fight each other in the fall for a harem of five to 40 cows in a sparring ritual called *rutting*. During the winter, woodland caribou inhabit high elevation subalpine forests, where they feed on lichens draped from trees. In the spring, females tend to descend in elevation with the rest of the group and then return to higher elevation ridgetops in June to calve. Caribou have a low reproductive rate; usually a cow will give birth to a single calf. As snow melts, the rest of the animals move back up the slopes near timbered areas, spruce bogs and meadows. Primary summer foods include sedges, fungi, mosses, lichens, and the leaves and twigs of woody plants.

### HISTORY

Prior to 1900, caribou were distributed through much of Canada and Washington, Idaho and Montana. They are occurred in the northern tier states of the United States, including Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan over to the northeastern states of Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire. In Idaho, caribou historically occurred as far south as the Salmon River.

### DISTRIBUTION

Only one population is left in the lower 48 states — the Selkirk Mountain herd which ranges from northeastern Washington and Northern Idaho to southeastern British Columbia. By the early 1980s this population dropped to 25-30 individuals around Stageleap Provincial Park, British Columbia. Caribou translocation efforts were conducted in Idaho and Washington in 1987, 1988, 1990, and 1996-98. Unfortunately, a core population of only 50 caribou occur in the Selkirk Mountain area.

### WHAT HAS THREATENED THIS SPECIES?

Habitat loss and fragmentation due to timber harvest and fire, predation, excessive mortality from overharvest, illegal poaching, accidental shooting, vehicle collisions and increased access all pose significant threats to the woodland caribou. Cougar predation and winter recreation also pose threats to the caribou. Populations growth is slow due to low reproductive rates and the female caribou's relatively late sexual maturity.

### WHAT IS BEING DONE TO HELP RECOVER THIS SPECIES?

Selkirk Mountains woodland caribou are ranked among the most critically endangered mammals in the United States. Hunter education programs and law enforcement are important recovery activities. Possible restrictions on activities and actions such as mining, timber harvest, road building and recreational activity may also help recover this species. The 1994 Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan also addressed the need to maintain the existing populations in the Selkirk Ecosystem, as well as to secure and enhance 443,000 acres of habitat in the Selkirks to support a self-sustaining population.

### REFERENCES

USFWS. 1994. Recovery Plan for Woodland Caribou in the Selkirk Mountains.

